

# 20 killed in Croatia fighting

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From Marc Champion  
in Belgrade

YUGOSLAV leaders at a peace summit last night ordered Croatia to demobilise its paramilitary forces and said federal army units in the republic would return to barracks if the order was obeyed. The call was made amid the bloodiest fighting to date between the Serbs and Croats of eastern Croatia. As many as 20 people were killed in the latest clashes.

Macedonia's President, Kiro Gligorov, who hosted the peace talks in the lake resort of Ohrid, said the Yugoslav collective presidency and the heads of the six republics also called for European Community peace observers to visit the scenes of ethnic clashes in Croatia. "If these conclusions are implemented, the crisis can be brought under control," Mr Gligorov told a news conference at the summit, which had been overshadowed by the fighting.

The Yugoslav news agency, Tanjug, said Croatian police and national guardsmen launched the first of three mortar attacks on the small Serbian village of Mirkovci at 5am yesterday. Zagreb radio said 14 Croatian guardsmen, one policeman and five civilians were killed in the fighting and 21 were wounded. The inhabitants of Mirkovci, about 100 miles from Belgrade, had reportedly spent the weekend lobbing mortar shells into the predominantly Croatian village of Vinkovci. The attack appears to have been in retaliation.

The Croatian Information Minister, Hrvoje Hitrec, said casualties in Croatia had reached 66 dead and 249 wounded. These included only eight deaths among Croatia's minority Serb population. More than 100 people have died in Croatia since May. The death-toll after the federal army's invasion of Slovenia was 64.

All the republican presidents attended the talks yesterday in Ohrid, but the severity of the latest events in Croatia forced Croatian President Franjo Tudjman to fly home from the meeting less than five hours after it began. Later, he called on his countrymen to prepare for "widespread war."

Against the backdrop of bloodshed neither the Serbian nor the Croatian press was placing much faith in the talks.

Meanwhile, the Yugoslav government yesterday accused Croatian police of roughing up the federal Agriculture Minister, Steva Mirjanic, a Serb, repeatedly striking him with the butt of a gun after pulling him out of his car.



A Croatian policeman keeps watch as security forces engage Serb militiamen Photograph: David Rose